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SUBJECT: KNU RIFT WIDENS

REF: A. A) RANGOON 08

[1](#)B. B) (06) RANGOON 1828

CLASSIFIED BY: Bea Camp, Consul General, U.S. Consulate General  
Chiang Mai, U.S. Dept. of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b)

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: A growing split among leaders of the Karen resistance to the Burmese military government has broken into the open in the wake of the Dec. 26 funeral of long-time Karen National Union (KNU) leader Bo Mya. Thai observers are concerned that the dispute will further weaken the KNU, with possible negative effects on Thai border security. End summary

[1](#)2. (U) Although 79-year old KNU Gen. Bo Mya was ailing for several years, his charisma and years at the helm helped prevent long-standing disagreements among various factions within the KNU and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) from boiling over.

The large and politically diverse turnout for his funeral masked a widening rift in the Karen resistance, as ethnic Karen villagers, exiled political activists, officers from the Burma Army and the pro-regime Democratic Buddhist Karen Army, and representatives of Burma's State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and Thai military intelligence gathered to pay their respects.

[1](#)3. (U) Within days of the funeral, KNLA 7th Brigade Commander Brig Gen Htain Maung broke ranks with the KNU Central Committee by leading a delegation to Rangoon Jan. 3-11. The KNU responded on Jan. 30 by dismissing Htain Maung, leading the general and some KNU military officials to form a splinter group the next day under the title of "Peace Council". The KNU on Feb. 4 issued a statement decrying Htain Maung's actions and forwarded a statement by Bo Mya's widow denying allegations that she had joined the Peace Council.

[1](#)4. (C) The KNU earlier expressed to the Thai military its disapproval of the 7th Brigade's action in a Jan. 17 letter from KNU General Secretary Mahn Sha La Phan to RTA Commander Gen Sonthi Boonyaratkalin. In the letter, provided to the Consulate by a contact from the Thai National Intelligence Agency (NIA), the KNU executive committee confirmed that the KNU would not move on ceasefire talks without RTA approval.

[1](#)5. (SBU) Both National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB) foreign affairs committee member Nyo Ohn Myint and an NIA contact denied reports that the Thai military is pushing the KNU to deal with the regime. Thai field security units that have monitored developments since Bo Mya's death believe the SPDC does not genuinely want a ceasefire with the KNU. Nyo Ohn Myint warned that an agreement between the regime and the 7th Brigade "might threaten Thai security," explaining that "the Thais can't monitor the road from Mae Sariang to Mae Sot; the KNU is their eyes." At the same time he acknowledged that Thai business interests in the timber on land controlled by the 7th Brigade could lead some Thai officials to favor a ceasefire.

[1](#)6. (SBU) Comment: Disagreements between the KNU and the 7th Brigade have been brewing for more than a year, ripe for

exploitation by the Burmese regime. An NIA contact described the SPDC tactic of using economic and business incentives as "bait" to entice splits in the KNU, as it has successfully done with other armed ethnic minority groups in Burma. If so, the tactic has succeeded; KNLA Gen. Isaac Po contacted the Consulate over the weekend to say "we have been wedged by the SPDC." Embassy Rangoon notes that with the 7th Brigade controlling nearly half of the KNLA's soldiers and the 5th Brigade reportedly sympathetic to the 7th Brigade, a permanent rupture would seriously weaken the Karen resistance.

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